

Pluralism in Islam: Nature and Development

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A pluralistic society has been described as one where a variety of religious or cultural groups live together. Pluralism was evident in many societies throughout human history and is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon. Almighty Allah's scheme of the world is basically and essentially plural. The *Qur'an* says:

O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other, verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you, and Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted.¹

Almighty Allâh has created humankind into many races and nations, bestowed them varying languages and diverse religions and cultures. Every race is different from the other in their physical appearances and nature, which is the reflection of His beauty. Had Almighty willed He could have made humankind into one nation, following one and the same religion or *culture*. In keeping with this divine plan of diversity, the *Qur'ân* provides the ample guidelines, necessary precepts and instructions for the growth and development of diverse human society. Following the Qur'ânic guidelines, Muhammad (SAAS), the Prophet of Islam, practically demonstrated the formation of a peaceful pluralistic society or an *Ummah* in Madina after his migration (*hijrah*) from Makkah (622 A.C). The *Ummah* was comprised of Muslim majority and non-Muslim Jewish minority of Madina. This pluralistic society or

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Ummah was successfully formed by adherence to the Qur'an; supplemented by a constitutional and legal framework obtained through a treaty, which was concluded after a thorough creative and consultative process. The pluralistic *Ummah* was created without the might of arms or the scale of wealth, but through the unyielding principles of Islam tolerance, love, reason, justice and a belief in Almighty God, whether the God in the *Qur'an*, the Bible, or in the Torah. The relevant Qur'anic guidelines and the constitutional and legal framework obtained by the Prophet (SAAS) became the blue-print for all the successive Muslim rulers after him. Due to strict pursuance of the Prophet's (SAAS) approach towards constructing and cherishing a pluralistic socio-political structure by his successors, we do not find traces of religious coercion and persecution of non Muslims in Arabia, Central Asia, and Central East Asia, India etc. during the long history of Muslim rule.

The formation of the Prophet's (SAAS) pluralistic *Ummah* is very relevant to the current tensions existing between the Muslims and the people of other faiths. In the present globalized world where we are connected so easily, unlike any other period in history, our mutual understanding of one another and our faiths can become the most important tools to reconstruct the universal pluralistic society (*Ummah*) of Muhammad (SAAS). Just as in the streets of Madîna, through tolerance, love reason and justice, we too may one day have a world-wide *Ummah*, where a passing Christian, Jew or a Hindu will say to a Muslim, "Peace be upon you" and the Muslim replies, "Peace be upon you too."

A pluralist society has been described as one where a variety of religious or cultural groups live together. Pluralism has been evident in many societies throughout human history and is by no means an exclusively modern phenomenon. In the recent Western context, the term pluralism describes the reality of different religions and cultures existing alongside one another in relative peace within a larger political structure. There is no effort to make value judgments about these religions and

cultures. Pluralism simply describes the reality that they are allowed to co-exist peacefully within the same environment.

Almighty Allâh created and cherished humans into all-different beings. No two human beings, who may be closely related biologically, are exactly the same physically and psychologically. In addition to racial and ethnic differences, there are the acquired differences in ideas, knowledge, approaches, priorities, and judgment, among many others that accrue from the surrounding culture.

Faith belongs somewhere between an inherited and an acquired difference. It can be inherited by succeeding generations from an earlier one or it can develop from a system of beliefs through personal convictions. The fact that religious faith is most commonly inherited collectively rather than developed individually makes the acceptance of religious diversity essential for the well-being of human beings.

Religions and Cultures are bound to differ and vary from place to place and people to people. This difference and variance, nevertheless, do not necessarily lead to conflicts and pressures. On the other hand, eternal clash and conflict have been going on between culture and anti-culture, civilization and anti-civilization, the religious and irreligious, the values of *khayr* (good) and *sharr* (evil). Islam, therefore, calls for promoting cooperation and cordiality among all the forces of *khayr* and non-cooperation and no-compromise with the forces of evil. The Qur'an accordingly commands:

Cooperate in good and acts of righteousness and not to cooperate in evil and acts of transgression²

Pluralism is the institutional form in which diversity acquires acceptance in a particular society or in the world as a whole. It means something more than moral tolerance or passive co-existence. Tolerance is a matter of individual behavioral feeling and co-existence is the mere acceptance of others that does not go beyond absence of conflict. Pluralism requires organizational and legal measures to secure and sanction equality, and fraternity among all human beings as individuals

or groups, whether there are inborn or acquired differences among them. Pluralism also requires a serious approach towards understanding the other and constructive cooperation for the betterment of the whole society. All human beings should enjoy equal rights and opportunities, and all should fulfill equal obligations as citizens of a state and of the world. Each group should have the right to organize and develop, to maintain its identity and interests, and each should enjoy equality of rights and obligations in the state and in the world.

Pluralism means that minority groups can participate freely and equally with the majority in the society, yet maintain their particular identity and differences. For this purpose, the required guarantees are provided by the state and the law, first municipal law and eventually international law. Pluralism primarily refers only to racial and religious differences. However, in a democracy ideological and political differences also come under its purview. So, it has to be accepted that there can be other understanding(s) of the truth and thus a variety of beliefs, institutions and communities should exist together and enjoy equal legitimacy and rights. Relations should be constructive, whatever the beliefs of a particular group may be regarding the sole and ultimate Reality.

Pluralism in *Qur'an*

From the Islamic point of view, the *Qur'an* is divinely revealed, the unquestionable and the first source of knowledge and law; therefore, it is the key to understanding pluralism in Islam. The *Qur'an* provides the guidelines as well as the necessary instructions for obtaining a human society that is plural or multicultural in the true sense of the word. Also, in the Muslim history, probably in the human history, the first real occurrence of a peaceful pluralistic or multicultural society was in adherence to these divinely revealed Qur'anic precepts and instructions. Some of these Qur'anic guidelines and instructions are mentioned here;

(i) If it had been your Lords will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth, will you then compel mankind against their will to believe.³

It means that diversity in faith and religion is Allah's Will, because if Allah had wished He could have created all humans alike. Instead, He created a pluralist world with different faiths and cultures. He Himself liked having multitude of faiths and cultures on earth. Had it been His Will that only those who believe in One God (*Tawheed*) should remain no trace of other faiths and cultures would have been caused. Nor would it have been difficult for Him to providentially direct everyone to Islamic faith in such a manner that it would have been impossible for people to do otherwise. However, there is a profound wisdom underlying man's creation. By any compulsion towards Islamic faith, the divine plan and wisdom would have been totally defeated. It was Allah's plan to grant man a free-will so that he could make his choice between Islam and any other religion.

(ii) ...To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an open way, If Allah has so willed, He would have made you into a single people but His plan is to test you what He has given you, so strive as in a race in all goodness (*khairât*)...⁴

Allah made different faiths and religions in order to test the believers to what extent they contribute positively to seek His pleasure. The Qur'an commands to use the difference of faith to do good (*khayr*) and to compete with people of the other faiths in doing good (*khayr*). Differences lead to conflicts but the responsibility of the believers is to make use of this difference in establishing such a relationship with others in which they could compete in their positive contribution to the benefit of mankind.

(iii) The *Qur'an* declares: "There be no compulsion in religion, truth stands out clear from error whoever rejects *Taghut* and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks, and Allah hears and knows all things."⁵

This declaration came to Muslims with the advice to avoid all types of compulsive methods in the matter of faith and belief. It is the matter of conscience and free-will of man to embrace Islam or not. And there is no need of compulsive means as the religion of Islam and its proofs and evidences are plain and clear.

Muslims have been categorically banned from practicing what is called religious coercion or religious persecution. A distinct feature of Islamic history is that religious persecution of non-Muslims is almost absent from it. Jews, Christians and other sects have always been free to practice their religion; their churches, synagogues and other places of worship were respected all-along in Muslim society.

(iv)The Qur'an also declares that the guidance to the true path depends upon Almighty's Will. Prophet of Islam (SAAS) and his followers are bound to preach the truth and any negative tactic to make people accept Islam is not allowed;

It is not for you to guide them to right path, but Allah guides to the right path whom He pleases, whatever of good you give, benefits your own souls, and you shall only do so seeking the pleasure of Allah, whatever good you give shall be rendered back to you and you shall not be dealt with unjustly. ⁶

After *Hijrah* from Makkah to Madīna (622 A.C) some Muslims tended to hesitate in providing financial help to their needy non-Muslim friends and relatives. They thought that giving charity to non-Muslims was not "spending in the way of Allah" unless they become Muslims. The *Qur'an* rejected this notion and confirmed that the help and support is not a matter of faith in the sight of Allah. Muslims cannot deny help and support to non-Muslims at the time when the later are economically weak and suppressed. Rather, it is incumbent upon Muslims to extend help and support to all the needy people irrespective of their faith and religion. It is reported that after this Qur'anic revelation Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) ordered to help the needy and weak amongst all faiths.

(v) Allah Almighty protects each and every faith. He Himself plans to save these religions and their places of worship as per divine wisdom. The Qur'an says:

Did not Allah check one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been pulled down monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is commemorated in abundant measure. Allah will certainly aid those who aid Him- for verily Allah is full of strength, exalted in might.⁷

(vi)The Qur'an issues a call to dialogue with people belonging to other faiths and religions. It is also insistent about the form the dialogue should take and the way in which it should be conducted. It should not simply be an exchange of information; it should also be a way of behaving and of speaking to create a best relationship:

And argue you not with the people of the Book except in the best way, unless it be with those of them who do wrong, but say "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you."⁸

Say: O people of the book! Come to common terms as between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, that we associate no partners with Him, that we erect not from among ourselves lords and patrons other than Allah, if then they turn back, say you, Bear witness that we at least are Muslims.⁹

Dialogue primarily serves to convey the message of Islam to the people of other faiths. Besides, it helps to promote interfaith relationship by convergence to common terms and points of agreement for mutual peace and prosperity. It is incumbent upon those Muslims in affair to engage with other faiths for mutual peace and understanding. The Qur'an also encourages and emphasizes cooperation between the faiths as it commands to "cooperate in piety and the acts of righteousness"

to meet the common human challenges in the form of poverty, disease, natural calamities, conflicts etc.

(vii) The *Qur'an* discourages inter-religious disputes among men. It says:

To every people have we appointed rites which they must follow: Let them not then dispute with you on the matter, but you invite to your Lord: for you are assuredly on the right way. If they still dispute with you, Say "Allah knows best what it is you are doing."
¹⁰

During the early Madīnan period, some non-Muslims criticized Islam and argued with the Prophet (SAAS) on some Muslim rites and ceremonies. The *Qur'an* guides that the rites and ceremonies were also prescribed to every nation as per their religious need and time. Prophet (SAAS) and his followers are advised not to argue and dispute with those non-Muslims who argue and dispute with them. Rather, they should preach and call to the worship of Allah and avoid wrangle with their fellow non-Muslim disputers. In case these disputers continue to argue, Muslims should avoid them and wait till Allah judges the deeds on the day of judgment. This is more than tolerance for a peaceful living between Muslims and non-Muslims.

(viii) The *Qur'an* strictly prohibits abusing other religions and their deities. Though Muslims do not believe in other religions and their deities but they cannot abuse and revile them:

Follow what you are taught by inspiration from your Lord, there is no god but He, and turn aside from those who join gods with Allah. If it had been Allah's Will, they would not have taken false gods, but We made you not one to watch over their doings. Nor are you set over them to dispose of their affairs. Revile not you those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest they out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance¹¹

The *Qur'an* also says that:

The religion before Allah is Islam (Submission to His will).¹²

It in no way reject other faiths. Here, other faiths are regarded as those in which original truths revealed by Allah have been distorted and/or corrupted by their followers and that the religion of Islam is the safe and un-corrupt one, acceptable to Him now.

The *Qur'an* does not refute any religion, rather it recognizes them. Also, while preaching Islam, Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) never repels other creeds like Christianity, Judaism etc. Rather, he pointed out the corrupt and unbecoming attitude of the followers of these religions. Even a single word of refutation of any religion is not seen in the letters and the messages of the Prophet (SAAS) sent to non-Muslim leaders of his time.

Although, Islam recognizes other faiths and religions but it does not in any way accept the unity of all religions. It is much more realistic in the sense that it accepts faith-based difference so much so that faith is the criterion for distinguishing men. Theologically, it distinguishes men into believers and non-believers and legally into Muslims and non-Muslims. But, despite this, it advocates and emphasizes tolerance, love, respect and peaceful co-existence with the people of all other faiths. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the saying "Let us agree to disagree" for mutual understanding, peace and development.

The above *Qur'anic* guidelines provide fundamental basis for building a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. These guidelines have been practically demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) when he concluded a treaty called *mithaq-i- Madina*, with the Jews of Madina (622 A.C) and founded a peaceful pluralistic community or *Ummah* comprising the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority. *Ummah* was created primarily by adherence to the *Qur'an* and secondly by the constitutional framework obtained through the treaty. This

treaty has 53 articles. The most significant article (Article 25) of the treaty that guarantees religious freedom and Pluralism mentions; “The Jews of Banu ‘Awf are a community (*Ummah*) along with the believers. To the Jews their religion and to the Muslims their religion”.¹³ The article 37 of the treaty says:

It is for the Jews to bear their expenses and for the Muslims to bear their expenses. Between them (that is to one another) there is help (*nasr*) against whoever wars against the people of this document. Between them is sincere friendship and honorable dealing, not treachery...¹⁴

This treaty was a conciliatory and friendly one and determined the rights and duties of Muslims and Jews. It determined the political status of the Prophet (SAAS) and that of all the people living in Madîna. Also, it made a strong Madînan defence alliance against any outside attack. This treaty secures only two privileges for the Muslim majority which includes (i) the functions of the final court of appeal will be discharged by the Prophet (SAAS) and that (ii) the question of war and peace is the prerogative of the Prophet. In all other matters including human rights, civil liberties, social security etc., Muslims and non-Muslims are equal. Since, this treaty regulated the individual and collective socio-economic and political life of all citizens (Muslims and the non-Muslims) in Madîna, it is referred as *Sahîfa al- Madîna* or the Charter/ Constitution of Madîna.

Madînan Treaty by the Prophet (SAAS) led to the first real occurrence of peaceful co-existence between religions and cultures in history. Although the Treaty is a creative one, but it mirrors the divinely revealed Qur’an in its entirety and provides ample material for extrapolating a pluralistic and inclusive theology of religions. Similar treaty was signed by the Prophet (SAAS) with the Christians of Najran (631 A.C) conferring almost equal rights to the Christian citizens as to the Muslims. Later, after the Prophet (SAAS), Muslim Caliphs and rulers followed the similar set of terms in dealing with their respective

non-Muslim contemporaries. Generally speaking, Islamic civilization has proved to be more successful in managing pluralism and realizing unity in diversity through its worldwide *Ummah*.

The Madīnan Charter (and the consequent *Ummah* formed by the Prophet) is very relevant to the current tensions existing between the Muslims and the people of other faiths. This Charter shows how to reject the use of compulsion and violence and that the most effective way to resolve conflicts comes through mediation and dialogue. Also, that peace can be achieved without the might of arms or the scale of wealth, but through the unyielding principles of Islam- tolerance, love, reason, justice and a belief in Almighty God- whether the God in the *Qur'an*, the Bible, the Torah or in the Vedas .

Pluralism in Islamic constitutional and legal framework

Islamic sources of divine knowledge and law (*Qur'an* and *Hadith*) provide general principles for a way of life for the individual, the family, the society, the state and the world to secure peace, stability, justice and fruitful relations. They do not prescribe every detail of the practical programs, since many such details have to change to fit changes in the human circumstances in different times and places. Islam allows extensive room for the creativity of the human mind (*ijtihad*) to cope with those changes as they appear, for the human mind is also Allah's gift which has to be fully used and developed as per which His guiding message.

From Islamic point of view, Pluralism involves the interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims in two ways. First, it is non-Muslims in a Muslim majority society and second is the interaction through Muslim minorities in any non-Muslim society. First of all we will discuss the position and status of non-Muslims in a Muslim society/state.

Islam does not believe in different notions of nationality (*asbiyah*) based on race, lineage, blood relations, language etc.

It selected only the identity of ideas- principle, which depends upon the choice of man and not upon the accidents and hazards of birth-as the basic tie of society and the factor of union. Islam like other political or social systems makes a distinction between its followers and non-followers. Islam facilitates non-Muslims in subscribing to its faith without any coercion and compulsion and secondly, it treats followers and non-followers of the faith equally regarding their affairs of this world. It is the context, in which Islam provides for a definite code of living with the people of the other religions. Also, provision of the rights and duties through the constitutional law is closer to human reason and also more practical than allowing the assimilation and absorption of non-Muslims in a Muslim majority society. Recognition of the rights and privileges as minority is the aim of Islam for the fulfillment of which Prophet (SAAS) allocated a distinct constitutional status to non-Muslims as *Dhimmîs* or *ahl al-dhimmah* who live side-by-side with their Muslim majority. Terming non-Muslims of the state as *dhimmîs* or *ahl al-dhimmah* by the Prophet(SAAS) is in no way discrimination towards them, that particular in the age when religious persecution was the privileged right of the states. Rather, conferring a distinct state-subject relation to non-Muslims highlights the sense of responsibility that should prevail on both the state and the subject-about their rights and duties-towards each other. It is not the terminology used in the law, but in practical the rights and duties of each, the state and the non-Muslim minority, which determine position and status of non-Muslims (*Dhimmîs*) in a Muslim state.

Dhimmî literally means a person to whom protection is extended so that his life, property, honour, dignity and religion become safe. Thus, a *dhimmî* is such a non-Muslim citizen of a Muslim state to whom the society pledges to protect his life, property, honour, dignity and religion against the payment of *Jizyah*. *Jizyah* is the tax levied on non-Muslim subjects in return for the services rendered by the state. It is an annual tax levied on able-bodied males only while all others who do not have any

income including women, old, children etc. are exempted from it. It is a nominal amount that is easy to pay. There is no definite amount fixed by Islamic law for *Jizyah*. Rather, Muslim state has the right to fix the amount according to the financial position of the non-Muslims without putting them to difficulties. A non-Muslim who serves in Muslim army is exempted from *Jizyah*. The non-Muslim clan or territory, to whom state has failed to provide protection as per constitutional provisions, is exempted from the *Jizyah*.

Non-Muslim minorities (*dhimmîs*) enjoy equal human rights and civil liberties in a Muslim state as enjoyed by the Muslims. These rights and liberties are enshrined and guaranteed in its constitution. In addition to the legal and constitutional guarantees, the moral code of Islam is very strong to avoid any chance of violation of minority rights in the Muslim society. For example, Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) once said:

Whoever murders a *dhimmî* (a non-Muslim citizen) shall remain deprived of the fragrance of paradise when it can be enjoyed at a distance of forty years.¹⁵

The Islamic state guarantees not only the safety of the lives and honor of the non-Muslims and the protection of their religious beliefs and rituals but also the protection and maintenance of their personal laws, institutions and endowments. In some cases, the expenses for the maintenance and repair of the places of worship of the non-Muslims are/were met from the public treasury (*bayt-al-mâl*). Similarly, the salaries of rabbis and priests were often paid from the state treasury.

The plural nature of Islam is also evident from the fact that it permits Muslims to eat food of the Jews and Christians. Accordingly, Muslims can eat the flesh of otherwise lawful animals slaughtered by Jews and Christians. The Muslim man can marry Christian and Jew woman without her conversion to Islam. Islam has made the marriage of Jewish or Christian women lawful for Muslim men for they being the People of the

Book, (*ahl- al- kitâb*). If a Muslim is convicted in crime like adultery or theft, he has to be prosecuted and subjected to punishment as per Muslim legal norm (hudud). However, non-Muslims are not subjected to Muslim legal punishment (*hudud*) for committing adultery, theft etc.

Muslim minorities in non-Muslim society/state

Islam regards citizenship as a sacred contract between a Muslim and the state. Muslims who choose to make their homes in non-Islamic countries must honour the duties of this contract. The rights and duties of citizenship cannot be taken lightly. Rights should be demanded truthfully and the duties discharged faithfully.

At the same time, it is a Muslim's duty to strive for the preservation of belief, life and security in one's immediate environment. That is combined with the Qur'anic directive that believers should be witnesses for God, standing up for justice, whether it is against oneself, one's family, the rich or the poor. In fact, justice must be the overriding constant in every situation and under all circumstances.

Pluralism in Muslim History

History bears testimony to the fact that pluralism has been one of the most distinctive features of Islam. During the Muslim rule in Arabia, Central Asia, Central East Asia, India etc. the religious persecution and faith-based mal-treatment to non-Muslims is totally absent. From the pages of history, we find that Muslims, Christians and Jews were living together peacefully during the entire Muslim rule in Arabia including Jordan, Syria, Jerusalem etc. Pertinently, the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 637 A.C put an end to the centuries old instability, religious persecution and colonial rule once by the Egyptians, another by the Greeks, a third by the Persians and a fourth by the Romans. Muslims were a new breed of humans to the natives of Palestine, different from all those who invaded their country before. For both Jewish and Christian inhabitants

of the conquered lands, Islamic rule signaled the start of the golden age. The territories under Muslim rule became the safe havens to which many Jews and Christians fled to escape persecution in their own homelands. It was in Muslim cities that many Christians and Jews found the opportunity to acquire learning and to excel in various fields of knowledge and expertise. Many of them had become historic figures who benefited from as well as contributed greatly to the Arab Muslim civilization.

While narrating the behavior of Muslims towards the people of other faiths, the noted writer and author on the issues of Islamic art and culture, Prof. T. W. Arnold (1864-1930 A.C) wrote :

When the Muslim (Arab) army reached the valley of the Jordan and Abu Ubaidah pitched his camp at Fhil, the Christian inhabitants of the country wrote to the Arabs saying: ‘O Muslims, we prefer you to the Byzantines, though they are of our own faith, because you keep better faith with us, and your rule over us is better than theirs, for they have robbed us of our goods and our homes’. The people of Amessa closed the gates of their city against the army of Heraculus and told the Muslims that they preferred their government and justice to the injustice and oppression of the Greeks.¹⁶

While commenting on the historical visit of Khalifa Omar bin Khattab (RA) to Jerusalem in 639 A.C, Prof. T. W. Arnold wrote:

In company with the Patriarch, Omar visited the holy places, and it is said while they were in the Church of the Resurrection, as it was the appointed hour of prayer, the Patriarch bade the Caliph offer his prayers there, but he thoughtfully refused, saying that if he were to do so, his followers might afterwards claim it as a place of Muslim worship.

This was the attitude of the Muslims and noble example of Muslim’s tolerance towards non-Muslims.¹⁷ During the Umayyad (661-750 A.C) and Abbasid period (750-1258 A.C), Muslims encouraged diversity and rewarded people for speaking many languages and bringing the richness of their

backgrounds. In fact during that time scholars, artists, poets and litterateurs came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (speaking Aramaic, Arabic, Persian and Turkish), colours (white, black and mulatto), and creeds (Muslim, Christian, Jew, Sabian and Magian). It was this cosmopolitan and multicultural attitude of Baghdad that made for its enduring strength as a great centre of culture. It is, therefore, evident that today's pluralism and multi culturism has its roots running through the 7th and 8th century Umayyad and Abbasid period.

History is the testimony that Christians and Jews in Andalusia, Spain lived peacefully and happily under Muslim rule (711-1492 A.C) and therefore non-Muslims survived and grew there even after seven hundred years of Muslim rule. Under Muslim rule, Christian and Jewish communities generally flourished from Spain to Iraq.

The Muslims ruled India for nearly eight hundred years from 1526-1858 A.C Even then Hindus always remained the majority in the old quarters of Delhi, the seat of Mughal dynasty, all through history. The Hindus held prominent position in Mughal courts, from Emperor Babur to Aurangzeb and thrived in all fields of knowledge, from music to military craft. History records that Aurangzeb punished the grandson of his Prime Minister Azad Khan, Mirza Tafakhur who outraged the modesty of a non-Muslim woman. Aurangzeb wrote in reply to the plea for Mirza's relinquishment: "It is my duty to prevent oppression on the people who are a trust from the Creator"¹⁸

Despite the significant and historical role Islam played in creating and developing pluralistic societies all-along, majority of the non-Muslim Western scholars still believe that Islamic religion and culture lacks flexibility to co-exist with other religions and cultures. Rather, they claim that this religion and its values are at clash with other religions and cultures, particularly the modern Western culture and civilization. One such view has been put forward by Samuel Huntington (1927-2008 A.C), an American political scientist, who argued that the Islamic culture of the East lacks the mechanisms to

accommodate the democratic values of the West. Factually, Huntington has noted this notion in his ignorance of the growing Islamic tradition and teachings. His argument represents a sheer negation of the Islamic principles concerning pluralism and diversities of human culture. Both the sources of Islamic law and knowledge (*Qur'an*, *Sunnah*, *Ijma* and *Qiyas*) and the Islamic history provide effective mechanisms for Islam to accommodate any credible value, Eastern or Western. In fact, long before the modern Western concept of pluralism was conceived, Islam was promoting peaceful and harmonious co-existence and humane relationships among different groups of people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, what is required of today to end the existing misconceptions barriers between the serene pluralistic teachings of Islam and the Western values of democracy and Diversity is the deep knowledge and understanding of each other's culture and civilization. Muslims all-along have been the torch-bearers of peace, and a sincere effort continues on part of some Muslim quarters to know and understand the Western culture and its positive and negative impacts on human peace and development. Whether, West shall welcome and extend its hand of cooperation towards this sincere effort for mutual peace and understanding, cannot be guaranteed as yet. In this regard it is worth to quote an eminent British author and scholar on comparative religions, Karen Armstrong (born 1944 A.C), who writes:

On the one side) Muslims need to understand Western tradition and institutions more thoroughly today, the West needs to separate it from some of their prejudices. Perhaps one place to start is with the figure of Muhammad (PBUH): a complex, passionate man who ... founded a religion and a cultural tradition that was not based on the sword- despite the Western myth- and whose name 'Islam' signifies peace and reconciliation.¹⁹

Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000 A.C), another noted western scholar of comparative religions, who summarizes the fundamental weakness of both Western civilization and the Christianity in the following words:

It is their [West and Christianity] inability to recognize that they share the planet not with inferiors but with equals. Unless Western civilization intellectually and socially, politically and economically, and the Christian church theologically, can learn to treat other men with fundamental respect, these two in their turn will have failed to come to terms.²⁰

References and Notes:

- ¹Al-*Qur'an* 49:13.
²Ibid. 5:2.
³Ibid. 10:48.
⁴Ibid. 5:48.
⁵Ibid. 2:256.
⁶Ibid. 2:272.
⁷Ibid. 22:40.
⁸Ibid. 29:46.
⁹Ibid. 3:64.
¹⁰Ibid. 22:67-68.
¹¹Ibid. 6:106-108.
¹²Ibid. 3:19.
¹³M.S Qureshi, *Foreign Policy of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)*, Kitab-Bhawan, New-Delhi, 1991 P.139.
¹⁴Ibid. P 140.
¹⁵*Abû-Dawûd, Sunnan*, Arabic-Urdu: Translated by Waheed uz-Zamân Khân, A'itiqâd Publishing House, Delhi, Vol. II P 391.
¹⁶T. W. Arnold. *The Preaching of Islam*. Adam Publishers and Distributors, New-Delhi 2002, P 55.
¹⁷Ibid. P 57.
¹⁸Sarkar, J. *Anecdotes of Aurangzeb*. Sangam Books, London, 1988, P 109-110.
¹⁹Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam*, Gollancz Ltd. London. 1992, P 266.
²⁰Smith, W.C. *Islam in Modern History*. Princeton University Press, 1977, P 305.

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